

PRENTISS (D. W.)

# ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

Opening of the Medical Department

OF THE

COLUMBIAN UNIVERSITY,

District of Columbia.

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October 1, 1892.

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WITH A SKETCH OF

LIFE AND WORK OF EDWARD T. PRISTOE, LL. D.,

Late Professor of Chemistry, Columbian University.

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By D. W. Prentiss, A. M., M. D.,

Professor of Therapeutics.

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OCTOBER 1st, 1892.

By D. W. PRENTISS, A. M., M. D.,

Professor of Therapeutics.

*Ladies and Gentlemen:*

It has fallen to my lot to-night to welcome you in the name of the Faculty—your teachers—to the opening of the seventy-first session of the Medical Department of the Columbian University; to a return to the labor which we have before us in common, namely, as complete a preparation as possible for the duties of the noble calling you have chosen as the work of your future lives: for the cure of disease; for the saving of human life; for the relief of human suffering. No profession or avocation in life aims higher, accomplishes more good to fellow men, or deserves better of humanity. So great is the frequency with which suffering is relieved, and even life itself saved, by the timely interposition of the skilled physician, that the service rendered is overlooked by the common mind, as a consequence naturally to be expected. And the Doctor works on quietly in his humanitarian calling, accomplishing day by day such happy results, that were they not in the line of routine duty they would entitle him to the everlasting gratitude of the recipients. He saves





life quite as certainly as does he who rescues the drowning person from a watery grave, or snatches a child from under the feet of trampling horses. Yet how different is the reception accorded to the deliverance in the two cases. In the latter instances, the preserver receives protestations of undying obligation, and the deed is heralded in the papers of the day as an act of highly commendable heroism.

When you have achieved the honorable aim of your ambition, and are launched out in your career, it will be your privilege, continually, to save life in the practice of your regular work; but you may not expect public recognition of the same, nor indeed will you often be cheered by private acknowledgment of the service rendered. But you will not be without your reward. A quiet conscience of duty well performed, a high standing in the community, the respect and confidence of your neighbors, and an assured support—these are the encouragements to look forward to, to stimulate you to enthusiasm in your studies, when hours of lectures drag wearily on, and the benches seem to grow each day harder and less inviting. You will need all the ambition you can command, at times, to spur you on. But remember always that the prize striven for is worthy of the sacrifice. Your Professors, I am sure, will spare no labor nor pains to make your training thorough, but the extent to which they succeed will depend upon the united efforts of both students and teachers.

To those of you who have attended previous courses of lectures it is only necessary to say we are glad to see you back again to resume your arduous studies. We welcome you to a return to the lecture room, to the Quiz, to the practical work in the laboratories and in the dissecting room. You know by past experience

what is before you and what is expected of you, and are prepared to take your places among the toilers, with zest in the work. After the respite of the summer vacation you feel inclined, perhaps, to stand for a moment shivering on the brink, before plunging into the stream of incessant labor of the winter's course. But the plunge is made, the ice is broken, and you find after all that the reality is not so appalling as it appeared from the distance.

You have, perchance, been traveling upon a country road, and noticed before you in the distance a steep hill, up which you doubted the ability of your horse to pull his load; but when you reached the foot and found how gradual was the ascent you could hardly believe it was the same. So do most of the difficulties of life dissolve in the grasp when boldly attacked. To those of you who come to us this session for the first time, who are now about to attend your maiden course of lectures, I extend also a cordial welcome to our school. You do not yet know what obstacles will beset your pathway; you are starting out perhaps with the thought that the study of medicine is but a question of time, that you have but to fulfill the requirement of "three years" and walk off with your diploma. It is true you *may* add to your name the coveted *M. D.* in three years, but you must also in that time collect within your *calvariae* a vast deal of information and you must study in earnest if you indulge the hope of passing your final examinations.

A work on anatomy does not appear very formidable. "Gray's Anatomy" is full of well-executed, inviting pictures; it looks easy enough at a cursory inspection; but when you get down into it, there are bones and muscles, and arteries and veins, and nerves and lymphatics to be learned. Organs of special sense, organs of

secretion and excretion, organs of reproduction, conception, embryology—all start forth in ghastly array, to confront a timid neophyte. A truly discouraging outlook; but it is wonderful when you take hold with a will and keep at it with a steady perseverance, how all barriers are broken down, and how seeming chaos falls into line and order, as you make such knowledge a part of your own intellect.

All this is not said with any intention of discouraging the younger members of the class, but rather to put before you in a true light the responsibilities of your undertaking, in order that having once put your shoulders to the wheel, you may not turn back from meeting with unexpected obstacles. It is a fact to which I call your particular attention, that a very large percentage of those who begin the study of medicine never finish their course, but linger by the wayside and drop out of the race before the goal is won. This result is most commonly due to not having properly considered the matter at the outset. Let me express the hope that such may never be said of any of you. *Industry* and *perseverance* insure your success in your final examinations. *Industry* and *perseverance* will insure your professional success in after life.

In my remarks this evening, introducing you to your winter's work, it will not be out of place to say a few words on the intimate relationship which exists between the different divisions of the subject of medicine, namely: anatomy, chemistry, physiology, *Materia Medica*, surgery practice and obstetrics. These, as you know, are taught by different professors, and you are called upon to study them separately. But you can make no greater nor more unfortunate mistake than to form the idea that they are separate from each other, for they are entirely interdependent, and must be so worked



in together as to form in the sequel the complete superstructure of your professional education. The entire curriculum of the college is the architect's plan of the building. The work done by each chair corresponds with that of the separate skilled mechanics, such as the masonry, the carpentering, plastering, etc., each absolutely necessary, and dependent on the other, yet entirely disconnected as far as the nature of the material and the labor is concerned. The architect must be familiar with the province of each craft. It is he who must supervise the whole, and bring each to unite in harmony with all the others. The minutiae of detail, the facts to be learned, the classifications, etc., constitute the building materials for this edifice, to be reared within yourselves. And as with the tangible building, so with the *intellectual*, it will be solid, durable, desirable, exactly in accordance with the care exercised in the selection of the material, and the skill used in putting together the component parts in the most secure manner. As the foundation of a building must be of the most substantial character, so must it be with *knowledge* of medicine.

Anatomy, chemistry, physiology and Materia Medica lie at the foundation of the medical and surgical art, and unless you, in the beginning, become well grounded in these branches, you may never hope to rise above merest mediocrity in the practice of medicine and surgery after you have received the coveted degree. It is the intention of the Faculty to see to it that you are well informed in these branches, but we are desirous that you should look further in your studies than the mere passing of examinations, and realize the bearing and importance of what you are studying, in order not only that your interest may be increased, but that you will the more certainly hold fast the information you

gain for future use. The application of a knowledge of anatomy to surgery and the pathology of disease is so apparent to all that it is not necessary to dwell upon it. The success of the surgeon as an operator depends upon his intimate acquaintance with the structures into which he is to put his knife. It is said of that celebrated American surgeon, Dr. Valentine Mott, that he never performed any important surgical operation without first going into the dissecting room and reviewing the anatomy of the part to be operated upon, on the cadaver. Yet it was of Dr. Mott that Sir Ashley Cooper made the remark that "he had performed more of the great operations of surgery than any man of his day."

In practical medicine, how can you appreciate the lesions of typhoid fever unless you know the anatomy of the intestinal mucous membrane? How can you appreciate in this disease the necessity of rest in the horizontal posture, of avoiding drastic purgatives and indigestible food, unless you understand what is meant by "Peyer's Patches"? How can you know the danger which hangs over the patient's life from intestinal hemorrhage and perforation resulting in fatal peritonitis, unless you combine a knowledge of anatomy with that of pathology? It is a melancholy fact that a large percentage of the deaths from typhoid fever are from one or the other of these accidents, which might possibly be avoided by proper precautions at the right time. That most valuable axiom of treatment, namely, "*perfect rest*," so useful in this as in many other diseases, has its foundation on an anatomical basis.

It is a common thing to hear the expression among medical students "that anatomy is dry and uninteresting." Your distinguished Professor of Anatomy in-



dignantly denies this proposition. He tells you that anatomy *is not dry*, and he proves it by his lectures. If we can form an opinion by the manner in which medical students sometimes sweat over it toward the close of the session, when examinations loom up before them, any lingering doubts will be dispelled. I tell you also that *anatomy is not dry*, nor is physiology, nor chemistry, and you will agree with me while studying them, if you will keep before your minds the application to future uses of the facts you are called upon to learn in an isolated manner. You must disabuse your minds of the idea that the preliminary branches are tasks to be accomplished as so much necessary evil in the onward course to your degree. Try always to consider the practical bearing of your instruction upon future usefulness, rather than to look upon it as a collection of disjoined, wearisome facts, to be memorized as such.

A great many years ago when a student in the old Columbian College, I never understood what manner of use could be made, in after life, of the higher mathematics in any vocation except such as astronomy or engineering, which required mathematical calculations. How could I expect to solve the problem of life by the application of the principles of trigonometry, of analytical geometry, of differential or integral calculus? Of what use to me would be sines, cosines and tangents, logarithms and conic sections? I confess to you, I could not see the connection, yet in common with other students I applied myself to them, and even was credited with understanding something about them. I can realize now, as I did not then, the value of the training as a part of the course of mental discipline, but as far as practical value is concerned to one in our profession, it is absolutely a cipher. All that remains to me of

*calculus* is the name; the factors *Dx* and *Dy* have now no meaning to my mind, they are empty sounds.

Far different is it with you in your present studies—far different must it be. You are taught nothing that is superfluous or foreign to the vocation you have chosen, and if you forget what you learn, you must learn it over again later in life. Always keep in mind this truth: You are not studying for your diploma alone, but for something far more important beyond the date of graduation. I know of no better plan to render the study of medicine interesting, and at the same time assist the memory, than by associating some practical application with the subject matter of your studies. For instance, you are tracing out the course of the femoral artery. Instead of taxing your memory with the vessel and its surroundings in a disconnected form, you reflect: “This little tube carries within it a life stream; a very small wound of its walls would let life out; it may some day be my privilege to save a fellow being from death by means of the very knowledge I am now acquiring.” Will not such a consciousness as here implied be a powerful aid to the memory, and add zest to your study? Yet every region of the body has its important surgical relations. There is not an organ or structure in the human system but is subject to disease, and an acquaintance with the normal conditions must always precede the pathological. With physiology, chemistry and *Materia Medica*, the same statements hold good as with anatomy. A comprehension of these branches constitutes the groundwork or foundation on which all advanced knowledge of medicine is based. The practical application of the principles learned under these headings is so intimately interwoven in almost every problem which presents itself to

the medical mind that it is really embarrassing to select illustrative examples.

*Physiology* teaches us the principles governing the processes of *digestion*, *absorption* and *assimilation*—processes, the vital importance of which in the preservation of healthy vigor I need not do more than mention; principles which we apply continually, though unconsciously, in the selection of our daily food; principles which assert their force more noticeably in disease even than in health, when we are called on to direct the diet of the sick room. Then it is that the necessity appears to adapt the nutriment of the patient to his disease and the condition of his digestive system. This question is always one of paramount importance, beside which oftentimes the mere administering of drugs sinks into insignificance. In many diseases the sustenance of the system and the husbanding of the strength by means of proper nourishment is the leading indication of treatment, and the balance between life and death is frequently turned toward the bright side thereby.

### THE DEATH OF PROF. FRISTOE.

We meet to-night to inaugurate the seventy-first session of this school with a fair prospect before us of a pleasant and profitable winter's work. But, alas! our pleasurable anticipations are not without their shadow—the shadow cast by the death of dear Professor Fristoe the oldest member of the Faculty. We miss to-night his genial, familiar face. For twenty-one years he stood here evening after evening giving instruction to the successive classes of students now numbered in the *alma mater* of the medical department. For twenty-one years he has worked with us, and by his courteous manners endeared himself to both professors and stu-



dents. To-night for the first time he fails to lend his aid in the exercises of a public meeting : to-night for the first time he is absent from his accustomed place. The Destroyer, that is no respecter of persons, spares neither rank nor talent, strikes equally rich and poor, has left us but his memory. No more shall our ears ring with the tones of his hearty voice, no more shall we feel the influence of his genial presence : nothing is left to us but his good works and the echoes from the silent tomb.

It is perhaps not inappropriate that it should devolve upon the speaker this evening to pay a just and well deserved tribute to the memory of our deceased and greatly lamented friend. I have known him probably longer than any other member of our Faculty. Thirty-five years ago I appeared before Professor Fristoe at the old Columbian College on the hill at the end of Fourteenth Street for examination for admittance to the College. Well do I remember his kindly reception of the frightened candidate on that occasion. The interview is still so vividly fixed in my mind that I remember even the problems in geometry that he gave me to solve. Following that, I was under his instruction in mathematics in the daily routine of work at the College for three years—until graduation. He was then the same sympathetic friend, as well as thorough instructor, to the students that he has always been since. Among the college boys he was a universal favorite, which is saying not a little, for professors are not always favorites with college boys. He treated the boys then, as he has invariably treated his pupils since, as *young gentlemen*, and I well remember how distasteful it was to him to be detailed to *watch* a class during written examination. In fact, he told the boys

they were too honorable to need watching. Alas, I fear his confidence was sometimes misplaced.

Since the old college days I have known Professor Fristoe almost continuously, except the interim of the late war. For thirteen years we were associated in the Medical Faculty. Words fail me to express, on the part of my colleagues and myself, the esteem and respect in which he was held. He was always punctual to his engagements, both in the lecture room and at Faculty meetings. He never shirked a duty, and how he ever found the time and strength to accomplish his manifold work is a wonder to his colleagues. Certainly no other one person will fill his place. He was Professor of Chemistry and Toxicology in the Medical School; Professor of General and Analytical Chemistry in the Corcoran Scientific School, and Dean of the Faculty; Professor of Physics and Natural History in the Collegiate Department; besides doing constant work in analytical chemistry and instructing private classes in the laboratory. As great as is his loss in all directions, it will be felt most keenly in the Columbian University. As to his popularity with the medical students I need say nothing. None know better than yourselves how affable and obliging he always was, and of all your teachers none was held in higher esteem.

A tribute to the character of Professor Fristoe would be incomplete without reference to the esteem in which he was held by the lady students of the University. In him they felt sure of a friend and advocate. A number have spoken to me of his kindness, and more than one has said she did not see how she could return to the work of the chemical laboratory and not find him present. The Professor was ever noted for his gallantry to the fair sex, and was, among them, deservedly a favorite. To be chivalrous was to him second nature. That

vivacity of manner which made him so pleasant a companion also gave him the appearance of a much younger man than he really was. He was, in fact, the youngest looking man of his age that I have ever known. His real age as it appeared in the obituary, I am sure was a surprise to most of his acquaintances. He himself often referred to his health and youthful feelings. Only two days before his death, after the death of his mother, he said to a friend: "My mother lived to be ninety-two years of age; I shall live to be a hundred." Within forty eight hours he, himself, had "crossed the dark river."

His private life was without a blemish. He was never known to swerve from the very highest standard of honor in all his professional and social relations. A vivacious temperament, excellent memory and ready wit, combined with a generous spirit, made him socially one of the best of men. He was zealous where his convictions were involved, and impulsive by nature, yet his candid, kindly spirit was so well understood by his friends that he held fast their regard and esteem. Of his fidelity to friends, one of his colleagues who knew him best writes me as follows: "If a friend, or even an acquaintance, was criticized in his presence, he would always say something favorable, if it could possibly be said. In his hands a friend's character was always safe. His fidelity to his friends was one of the most beautiful traits in a character as beautiful as man could possess."

His generosity was proverbial and for his means lavish, while at the same time so modestly bestowed that but few of his deeds were even suspected outside of those immediately benefited. In his church, where he was a highly valued member, I am informed by one who knows, that he gave more money in proportion



to his income than any other member. The quiet modesty of his charities was only equaled by that of his professional career, and which was characteristic of the man, one of quiet, unobtrusive usefulness. No one ever heard him, even by inference, sound his own praises or make a virtue of his merits.

One of the most beautiful traits of his character was his devoted tenderness and affectionate care of his aged mother. Indeed, it was this filial love that led to the fatal illness. Rather than leave her to the care of others, he remained in the city during the hot summer, refusing to take the much-needed vacation. And the exposure to the sun during the intense heated spell, attending to the details of her funeral, brought on the sunstroke of which he died.

Professor Fristoe's death was sudden, caused by sunstroke. When he returned from the burial of his mother, he complained of feeling badly, but thought it would soon pass. During the night an unusual noise was heard in his room, and he was found unconscious. Physicians were called, but he never rallied, dying at 7 A. M., July 30th, the clinical thermometer recording a temperature of  $111^{\circ}$ . The news of his death came to his friends and associates as a stroke of lightning from a clear sky, and reaching beyond the confines of his native land, across the Atlantic Ocean, it summoned back our honored president from a special mission abroad. His place and work in the University were so important that his death rendered necessary here the presence of President Welling.

The last time I saw Professor Fristoe was at the steamer's wharf in Baltimore, July 9th, where he had gone to bid farewell to a party of dear friends sailing abroad, a trip which he also would have taken but for his filial devotion. Alas! had he gone with us we

would, in all probability, not now mourn his loss. When each of us shook him by the hand and received his cheery good wishes, little did we think we should see him no more on earth. The manner in which we learned the news of his death was almost tragic. On the night of August 19th, at the great opera house in Paris, in the corridor, between the acts, we met some Washington friends. After conversing a while, one of them said: "Have you heard of Professor Fristoe's death?" I denied it could be true, that there must be a mistake in identity. But my informant gave the details until doubt was no longer possible. It seemed like a dreadful dream—in a strange city, in a strange land, at an opera—that three of his students should have such news dropped on them like a thunderbolt. I need not say that we lost all further interest in French opera. The next day we sailed for home. Another of our faculty first heard the news abroad from a newspaper paragraph accidentally read.

Of Professor Fristoe it can be truly said: He was an *upright, honest man*, in the loftiest sense of the term. He was a *good citizen*, faithful in the discharge of his duties to society. He was a *true friend* to all those who enjoyed the privilege of his friendship. He was a *trusted, trustworthy teacher*. To what greater honor can man attain? I hope for myself no higher. God grant that to all of us it may come as well deserved as to Professor Fristoe. Let us keep his memory green.

We can assist to keep his memory green in the Columbian University. It occurs to me that it would be a graceful tribute if the professors and students would unite in placing a portrait of the Professor in the library room of the University. At the great University of Leyden, in Holland, the walls of the counsellor's room are covered with not less than three hun-

dred portraits in oil of deceased professors, among them that of the great Boerhaave. Such a collection is of great interest, stimulates ambition on the part of the students and holds out to the teachers the certainty that at least their memory will be honored. Let us initiate the custom in the old Columbian with the portrait of Professor Fristoe.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

EDWARD T. FRISTOE.

Born in Rappahannock County, Va., December 16, 1827; son of Joseph and Martha Fristoe. Received his early training at old-time country schools in the neighborhood of his home. At the age of seventeen years entered Virginia Military Institute at Lexington, Va., from which he graduated in 1849 with the highest honors. For two years was principal of an academy at Surrey Court House, Va. In 1852 entered the University of Virginia, from which he graduated in three years, receiving the degree of A. M. in 1855. He excelled especially in mathematics and natural sciences. At the university he had the respect and esteem of both professors and students, and was looked up to as a leader among the students. In 1855, while still a student at the University of Virginia, he was elected to the chair of mathematics in the Columbian College of Washington, D. C., which position he held with great acceptance until 1860, when he resigned to accept the chair of mathematics and astronomy in the State University of Missouri.

He entered the Confederate Army in 1862 as adjutant general of the Army of South Missouri, was made major in 1863 and soon after appointed colonel of cavalry. In 1864 he was with General Price in his march from the Arkansas to the Missouri River. He is spoken



of as having been a gallant soldier, conspicuous alike for his discretion and courage. After the close of the war, in 1865, he was elected to the chair of chemistry in the Columbian College, and in 1871 to the chair of chemistry in the Medical Department of the Columbian University; 1872, Lecturer on Chemistry in the National College of Pharmacy, District of Columbia; 1872, also the Degree of LL. D. from the William Jewell College of Missouri; 1874, Ph.D. from the National College of Pharmacy, District of Columbia; 1884, Professor of General and Analytical Chemistry of the Corcoran Scientific School, and Dean of the Faculty. At the time of his death he was Professor of Chemistry in Medical Department of the Columbian University; Professor of Chemistry and Physics in Corcoran Scientific School, and Dean of Faculty of the latter.



